

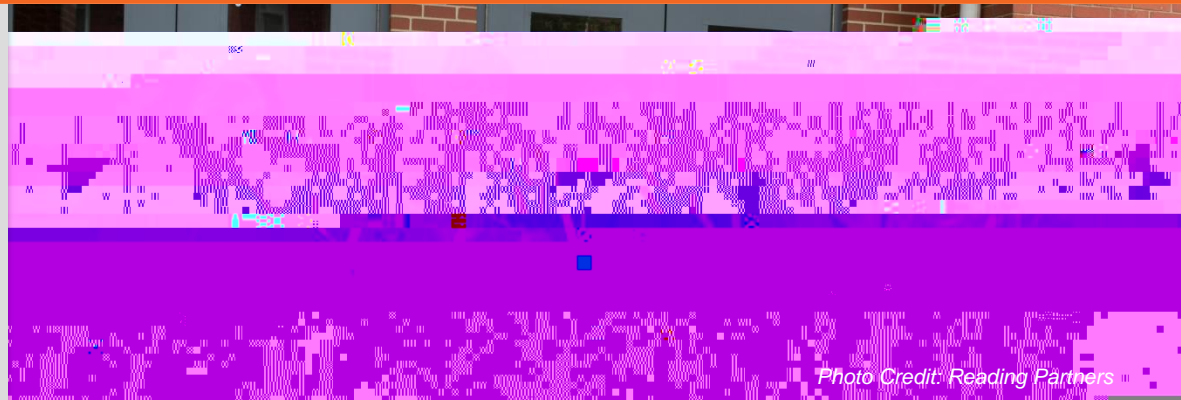
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## Overview

[Reading Partners](#), a national literacy nonprofit, engaged [Child Trends](#), a national, nonprofit research group, to learn more about how to improve programming and, ultimately, boost learning outcomes for students who struggle with reading. In California reading centers, Child Trends evaluated five key areas of Reading Partners programs:

**Dosage:** Document the amount of tutoring each student receives.

**Tutor engagement and quality:** Examine the extent to which Reading Partners is successful in recruiting, engaging, and retaining tutors. Assess the quality of tutors' interactions with students and the effect those encounters have on children.

**AmeriCorps member experiences:** Identify skills AmeriCorps members bring to Reading Partners and collect feedback about their experiences.

**Student reading growth:** Determine how student learning is linked to implementation characteristics and dosage.

**Social-emotional learning:** Take a first look at how Reading Partners affects students' social-emotional learning (SEL).

The findings in this report on AmeriCorps member experiences show that AmeriCorps members serving at Reading Partners:

Bring diverse skills, and report that these skills generally improve during the year.

Are more likely to report that their service developed their skills than those in a national cohort of alumni.)

Consistently rate their leadership skills lower than other skills.

Are highly satisfied with their experiences at Reading Partners.

Nevertheless, opportunities exist to further enhance their experiences through targeted training related to working with school partners and students with challenging behavior students. AmeriCorps members also said they would welcome more opportunities for career guidance, mentorship, and leadership skill building.

Three companion briefs discuss findings related to the other evaluation focus areas; an accompanying infographic integrates and summarizes findings throughout the study.

This brief is based on findings from an independent evaluation conducted by Child Trends for Reading Partners.



# Introduction

Reading is a critical academic skill, yet only 67 percent of U.S. children are read proficiently.<sup>1</sup> Reading Partners, a national literacy organization, is working to close this literacy gap by partnering with schools and engaging community volunteers to provide one-on-one tutoring to elementary school-aged students.

MDRC was commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education to conduct an independent evaluation of Reading Partners' California reading centers. This evaluation was designed to build upon the findings of a prior [evaluation](#) conducted by MDRC and provide a more in-depth examination of how key program implementation characteristics (e.g., tutoring dosage, fidelity, student-tutor relationships, and AmeriCorps member characteristics) influence children's learning. The goal was to provide actionable information to improve Reading Partners' effectiveness and enhance the experiences and outcomes of the children, volunteer tutors, and AmeriCorps members who participate in Reading Partners.

This report highlights key themes and findings from the evaluation and provides a snapshot of:

- [AmeriCorps members' skills and characteristics](#)
- [AmeriCorps members' satisfaction and efficacy](#)
- [Opportunities to enhance AmeriCorps member experiences](#)

To learn more about the methods used in this evaluation, please refer to the evaluation plan and the fact sheets published in Year 1 of the evaluation.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2012). [Reading Proficiency in U.S. Schools](#). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

# Research Questions

Our research about AmeriCorps member experiences addresses the following evaluation questions:<sup>2</sup>

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## AmeriCorps Member Characteristics

Across the 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 program years, more than 120 AmeriCorps members served in California reading centers. The majority of these members served as site coordinators/regional site coordinators (79 percent), playing a critical role managing California reading centers, developing relationships with school partners, coaching volunteer tutors, and serving as needed as tutors to students. The remaining AmeriCorps members serving at Reading Partners worked as literacy leads (11 percent) who provide direct tutoring to students who need the most support, and as volunteer coordinators (10 percent) who led the recruitment and on-boarding of volunteer tutors.

As displayed in [Table 1](#), nearly all AmeriCorps members who served at Reading Partners were female, more than half were ages 22 to 25, and most were white/Caucasian, followed by Hispanic/Latino, black/African American, and Asian. Additionally, the majority were either from or resided near the community in which they served.

AmeriCorps members who served at Reading Partners also were an educated group, with more than 90 percent having earned at least a four-year college degree. Additionally, approximately 80 percent had previously worked in a school and nearly one third had been involved with Reading Partners prior to their latest service, volunteering as either tutors or as literacy intervention tutors (a paid position). Data from interviews conducted with AmeriCorps members who served in the 2017–2018 program year suggest that the AmeriCorps members who previously worked with Reading Partners were motivated to serve by their positive prior experiences with the organization.

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AmeriCorps members who had served as Reading Partners tutors were motivated to serve again by the positive experiences they previously had at the organization.

*"I applied for this role because I really enjoyed tutoring and I*

Table 1: AmeriCorps member demographics (N=122)

### AmeriCorps members' motivation to serve

Various factors motivated AmeriCorps members to serve with Reading Partners (see [Figure 1](#)).

The factors included their desire to help others, learn more about the cause for which they were serving, and learn through hands-on experience. Data from AmeriCorps member interviews reflect this finding. Two thirds of respondents reported that they chose to spend their service year at Reading Partners because of the organization's mission to improve the educational outcomes of



## AmeriCorps Member Skills

For the AmeriCorps Member Experiences Survey administered each spring, we asked AmeriCorps members to discuss their soft skills in four key areas:

Across both program years, on average, AmeriCorps members reported high levels of civic engagement ( $M= 4.5$  out of 5.0) and social competence ( $M= 4.4$  out of 5.0), and moderately high levels of commitment to community ( $M= 4.1$  out of 5.0) and self-efficacy ( $M= 4.2$  out of 5.0).<sup>6</sup>

To better understand how AmeriCorps  
mem

To further explore how AmeriCorps members' civic engagement developed during their service at Reading Partners in spring 2018, we asked them to report how their experiences influenced the likelihood that they would participate in various civic engagement activities **such as voting or** volunteering for a cause. As noted in [Figure 3](#), AmeriCorps members were most likely to report that their service ha2359.33 T1 253cicipate





developed the least include facilitating groups; leading teams; conducting oneself in a professional manner; and planning, coordinating, and managing events. Many reported that their service at Reading Partners enhanced their ability to recruit and/or manage community volunteers. There was, however, notable variation in members' perceptions of this skill, which is likely related to the

All AmeriCorps who participated in the spring 2018 interviews reported that their service at Reading Partners helped them develop professionally. Most (67 percent) reported that their service helped them identify their future career path.

Recent studies have documented the long-term outcomes of AmeriCorps alumni.<sup>8, 9</sup> [Figure 5](#) highlights the proportion of national cohorts of AmeriCorps members who said their service developed their professional skills “a great deal.” These data are based on national samples





## AmeriCorps Member Satisfaction and Job Efficacy

A majority of AmeriCorps members at Reading Partners were satisfied with their service. Approximately 44 percent said they were completely satisfied and 45 percent said they were somewhat satisfied. Only 11 percent of said they were not satisfied with their service.

To dive deeper into AmeriCorps members' experiences at Reading Partners, we asked to report on a series of items related to their job efficacy, satisfaction with their school partners, and overall satisfaction with their service at Reading Partners. As [Figure 6](#) shows, AmeriCorps members reported moderately high satisfaction with their service at Reading Partners and job efficacy. They rated satisfaction with school partners the lowest. AmeriCorps members' ratings on individual items within these scales are detailed below.

Figure 6: AmeriCorps member satisfaction (n=124)

Note: Items are rated on a 5-point scale (1 = none of the time; 5 = all of the time). The satisfaction with school partners scale was only administered to site coordinators (n=109) Source: Child Trends AmeriCorps Member Spring Experiences Survey, 2016-2018.

### e d b e l e

Child Trends interviewed AmeriCorps members about their levels of satisfaction with aspects of Reading Partners. Half described high levels of satisfaction about their work with students.

*"Being able to work with the students, that's definitely my favorite part of the job. I love being able to be part of their progress in reading... I also love to kind of encourage them maybe in some other aspect like their confidence and how to navigate different situations." -Site Coordinator*

*"What's most satisfying is the actual work with the students... the more invested you are in your students, the more seeing them succeed makes you feel good." -Literacy Lead*

Among site coordinators interviewed, 66 percent expressed satisfaction with professional development opportunities. They cited being able to increase their management skills and the autonomy in running their centers.

*"I am really happy that I get to be in charge of my own center and really have a lot of autonomy and control." -Site Coordinator*

Volunteer coordinators expressed satisfaction with Reading Partners management. For example, one volunteer coordinator discussed organizational changes happening throughout the year and how managers executed a

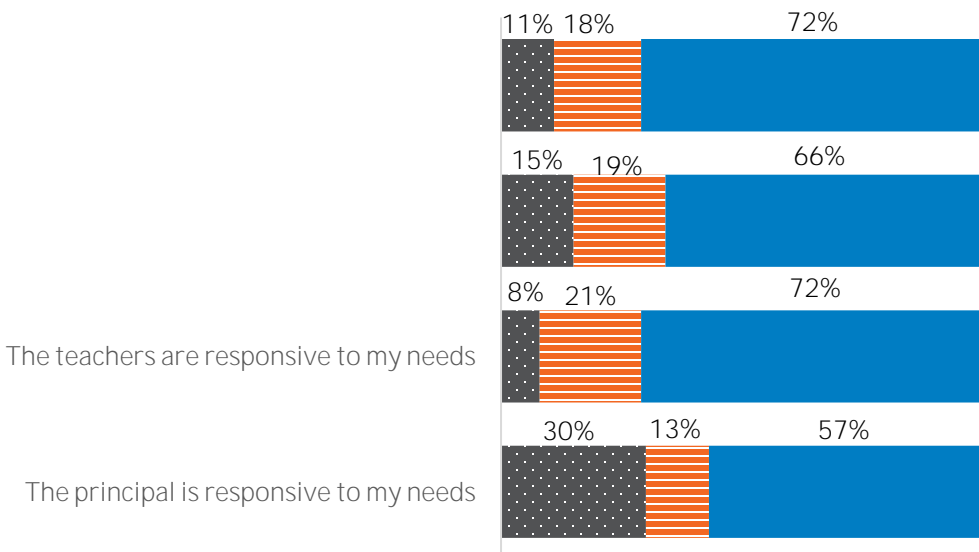
## Satisfaction with Reading Partners

As [Figure 7](#) shows, AmeriCorps members reported that their highest levels of satisfaction with

## Satisfaction with schools

AmeriCorps members rated their satisfaction with their school partners lower than their satisfaction with their overall service at Reading Partners (see Figure 6). In addition, as shown in Figure 8, there was quite a bit of variability in AmeriCorps members' perceptions that principals at their school sites were responsive to their needs. AmeriCorps members were slightly more satisfied with teachers' responsiveness to their needs "most of the time" (59 percent) than with their principals' responsiveness most of the time (34 percent). Moreover, 11 percent of respondents said their principal was responsive to their needs "none of the time." Thus, AmeriCorps members might benefit from additional support in working and coordinating with school partners, particularly principals.

Figure 8: AmeriCorps members' satisfaction with school partners (N=109)

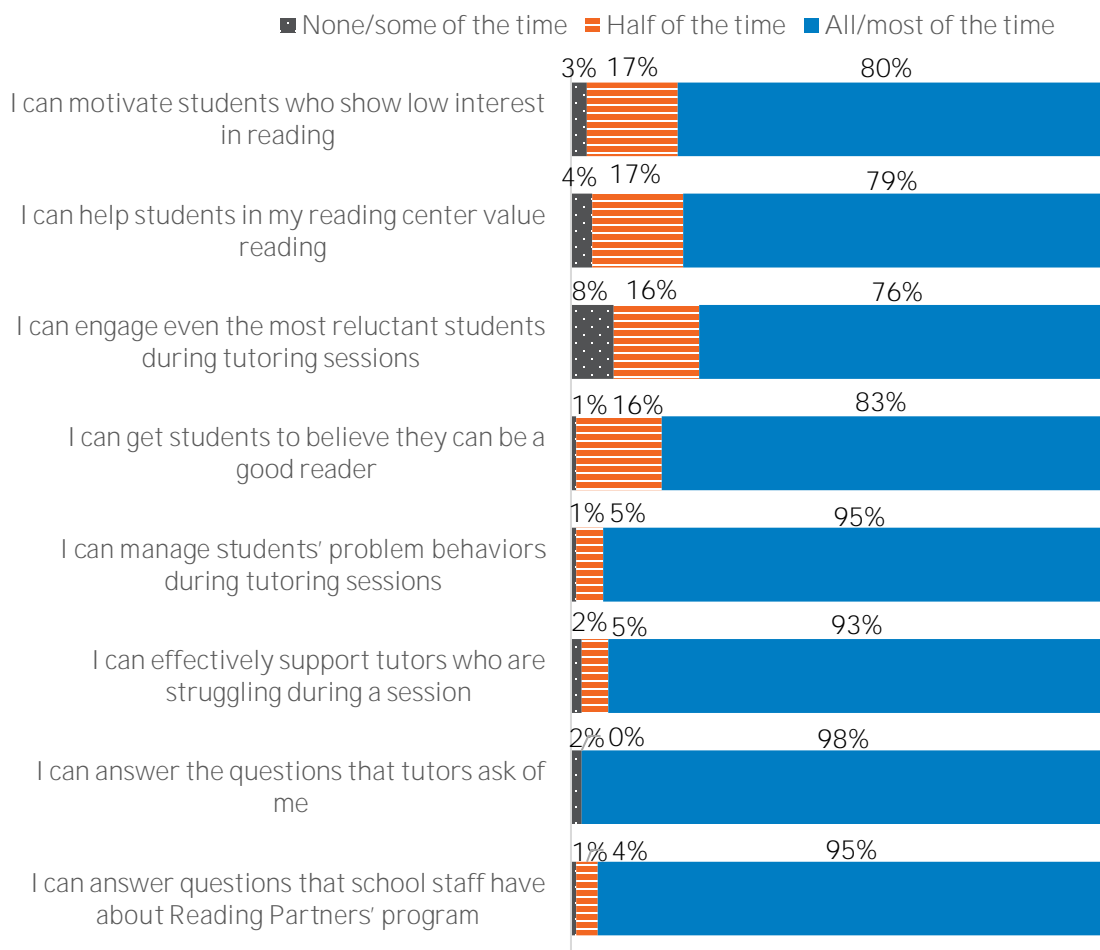




## Job efficacy

AmeriCorps members also reported how often they could effectively manage different aspects of their roles at Reading Partners. As Figure 9 shows, they generally felt that they were able to complete different aspects of their job all or most of the time. In fact, no AmeriCorps members felt that there was an aspect of their job that they could never do.

Figure 9: AmeriCorps members' job efficacy (N=124)



Source: Child Trends/AmeriCorps Member Spring Experiences Survey, 2016–2018. Please note that some of the items above have missing data.

However, as noted in [Figure 9](#), AmeriCorps members felt that they could most often answer questions from school staff and teachers, but sometimes had difficulty engaging with students who were reluctant during tutoring sessions.



Figure 10: Overall Satisfaction by Region





they wanted to pursue roles in education and/or nonprofit management.



mentorships, career guidance, and networking with other AmeriCorps members may enhance members' experiences with Reading Partners.

While AmeriCorps members reported being able to complete all aspects of their jobs at Reading Partners, some reported that they would have benefitted from more guidance related to working with students who either lacked an interest in reading or posed other challenges. This might be why literacy leads reported the lowest levels of satisfaction with Reading Partners, as these members spend nearly all of their time working strictly with students, and often focus on seeing challenging students.

Providing additional training and support to help members find ways to apply their skills to these students might be another strategy for R